

a first step of transferring said substrate, from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

2. (Twice Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:
a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber; and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from all of said three chambers during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

3. (Twice Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps: a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied to at least the chamber coupled to a vacuum pump among said three chambers and exhausted from this chamber using said vacuum pump during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

6. (Twice Amended) A substrate processing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps: a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

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a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber amber, and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

9. (Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of: exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps: a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

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a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and in this vacuum pump, a continuous gas flow is maintained from an upstream side to a downstream side of this vacuum pump during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

10. (Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of: exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and

transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber during said substrate transferring step.

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11. (Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of: exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber, the method further comprising the step of: continuously supplying and exhausting an inert gas to and from the preliminary chamber during a period in which the substrate is present within said preliminary chamber after the substrate is transferred into said preliminary chamber.

REMARKS

Claims 1-19 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 1-3, 6 and 9-11 are amended, and claims 7 and 8 are cancelled. No new matter has been added.

The attached Appendix includes a marked-up copy of each rewritten claim (37 C.F.R. §1.121(c)(1)(ii)).

Applicant appreciates the courtesies shown to Applicant's representative by Examiner Lee in the April 30 telephone interview. Applicant's separate record of the substance of the interview is incorporated into the following remarks.

Claims 1-4 and 6 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as anticipated U.S. Patent No. 6,328,864 to Ishizawa et al.; and claim 5 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as unpatentable over Ishizawa in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,037,272 to Park et al.

During the April 30 telephone interview, it was submitted that Ishizawa teaches away from the claimed invention, because Ishizawa fails to supply and exhaust inert gas to and from the chamber during the transferring step. At col. 8, lines 10-12, Ishizawa clearly states